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# CALIDORE STRING QUARTET

# BEETHOVEN

## THE MIDDLE QUARTETS

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### CD1

**String Quartet No. 7 in F major, Op. 59**
**No. 1 'Razumovsky No. 1'**

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | I. | Allegro | [10.04] |
| 2 | II. | Allegretto vivace e sempre scherzando | [8.31] |
| 3 | III. | Adagio molto e mesto | [12.55] |
| 4 | IV. | Allegro (Russian Theme) | [8.05] |

Total timings: [39.38]

### CD2

**String Quartet No. 8 in E minor, Op. 59**
**No. 2 'Razumovsky No. 2'**

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | I. | Allegro | [9.26] |
| 2 | II. | Molto adagio | [13.03] |
| 3 | III. | Allegretto | [6.57] |
| 4 | IV. | Finale - Presto | [5.29] |

**String Quartet No. 9 in C major, Op. 59**
**No. 3 'Razumovsky No. 3'**

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| 5 | I. | Andante con moto - Allegro vivace | [10.55] |
| 6 | II. | Andante con moto quasi allegretto | [9.07] |
| 7 | III. | Menuetto & Trio | [5.14] |
| 8 | IV. | Allegro molto | [5.47] |

Total timings: [1.06.00]

### CD3

**String Quartet No. 10 in E flat major, Op. 74 'Harp'**

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | I. | Poco adagio - Allegro | [9.41] |
| 2 | II. | Adagio ma non troppo | [10.14] |
| 3 | III. | Presto - Più presto quasi prestissimo | [4.58] |
| 4 | IV. | Allegretto con variazioni | [6.45] |

**String Quartet No. 11 in F minor, Op. 95 'Serioso'**

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| 5 | I. | Allegro con brio | [4.22] |
| 6 | II. | Allegretto ma non troppo | [7.33] |
| 7 | III. | Allegro assai vivace, ma serioso | [4.39] |
| 8 | IV. | Larghetto espressivo - Allegretto agitato - Allegro | [4.49] |

Total timings: [53.03]

CALIDORE STRING QUARTET

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## INTRODUCTION

Our quartet is continually drawn to Beethoven's music for the enduring relevance of his humanistic perspective. He was an artist who aimed to compose not for one portion of society, but rather to unite through our fundamental elements. These quartets from his middle period, herald his emancipation from the traditions of his time. In scope, content and emotional range, these quartets of epic proportion and intensity challenged the performers and audiences of the time.

To this day, they remain some of the most demanding works to perform in the entire string quartet canon. The virtuoso passages of the Op. 59 "Razumovsky" quartets, the tender lyricism of the Op. 74, to the extreme and unexpected shifts of character and atmosphere compressed into the Op. 95 (foreshadowing much of what is to come in his late works) expand our range, depth and versatility as musicians.

Our public performance of Beethoven's cycle of quartets affirmed to us that this music's immediacy is not contingent upon the century we live in, the country we come from, the generation we belong to, the beliefs we align with or other factors that may divide us. Beethoven's quartets appeal to the emotional experiences we share in common as human beings, which are far more substantial than what may divide us. These great works are also the result of Beethoven's struggles to overcome the challenges of his own life.

In this spirit, our project came together in a very "Beethovenian" way. The forced separation during the early days of the Covid-19 pandemic made us dream of ways to immerse ourselves once more in our craft and to share our music with audiences around the globe. This period made space for and propelled us towards the idea of recording this cycle of immortal works. We are grateful to the University of Delaware – where we serve as professors and Distinguished String Quartet in Residence – for stepping in to provide us with the use of the magnificent Gore Recital Hall for the six recording sessions. And we were fortunate to be introduced to the legendary producer Judith Sherman, an artist whose passion for these works and uncompromising standards have made her the perfect partner in chronicling our interpretations of Beethoven.

Now, finding ourselves at the end of this endeavor, the contents of this recording serve as a snapshot of our fourteen years of working, growing, listening and collaborating with one another.

Our interpretation speaks to the influences of our teachers and the great traditions associated with this repertoire, but also to that of our own generation, contemporary research, style and experience. Though this music speaks in a language that is hundreds of years old, its message remains immediate, relevant and comforting to listeners of today and of generations to come, especially in the most challenging of times.

Calidore String Quartet, September 2024

## PROGRAMME NOTES

*Introduzione*

Ludwig van Beethoven's first engagement with the most elevated of genres, the string quartet, was a torturous process. In the looming shadow of the Viennese masters, Joseph Haydn and Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, Beethoven was all too aware of the musical legacy that he was poised to inherit. It took him until the age of twenty-eight, six years after his arrival in Vienna, to begin work on his first set of six string quartets, Op. 18. Even after completion he showed his anxiety, drastically revising several of the quartets and writing in a letter to violinist friend, Karl Amenda, 'be sure not to hand on to anybody your quartet, in which I have made some drastic alterations, for only now have I learned how to write quartets'.

Beethoven had indeed learned how to write quartets. His next set of three string quartets, published as Op. 59, were completed in just a few short months in 1806. Commissioned by Count Andreas Razumovsky, the Russian ambassador to Vienna, and consequently nicknamed the 'Razumovsky' or the 'Russian' Quartets, they encompass an entirely different stylistic language to Op. 18, both symphonic in proportion and bold in emotional range. Reflecting these newly-expanded proportions, the rest of Beethoven's quartets were published thereafter as individual opus numbers – decisively breaking away from the tradition of publishing 'sets' of quartets, as exemplified by Mozart and Haydn. His next two string quartets, Op. 74 and Op. 95, were composed between 1808 and 1810. They are traditionally grouped with Op. 59 as his 'middle' quartets, and their completion marks the beginning of a ten-year hiatus before Beethoven's next engagement with the genre. From 1822 until the end of his life in 1827 Beethoven focused almost exclusively on string quartet writing, producing some of his most challenging and experimental compositions: the revered yet ever-elusive 'late' quartets.

*Op. 59: Thème russe*

In the shadow of the late quartets, it is easy to overlook quite how challenging Beethoven's middle quartets were to early listeners and performers. Laughter, incomprehension and even the trampling of sheet music are certainly not the responses that performers might expect to elicit today. Wilhelm von Lenz, Beethoven's first biographer, paints a vivid picture of two early encounters with Op. 59:

*"When at the beginning of the year 1812 the [second] movement [of Op. 59 No. 1] was to be played for the first time in the musical circle of Field Marshal Count Soltikoff in Moscow, Bernhard Romberg trampled under foot as complete mystification the bass part which he was to play. The Quartet was laid aside. When, a few years later, it was played at the house of privy Councillor Lwoff, father of the famous violinist, in St Petersburg, the company broke out in laughter when the bass played his solo on one note. – The Quartet was again laid aside."*

The setting of these encounters makes the mystified responses all the more surprising: surely a more favourable reception could be expected for Beethoven's 'Russian' Quartets in Moscow and St. Petersburg! Beethoven had paid explicit homage to his Russian patron through the inclusion of Russian folk tunes in all three of the Op. 59 quartets. Moreover, he ensured that these musical allusions were not only audible to listeners, but also visible to players in the notation – after all, Razumovsky was himself an accomplished violinist. The title 'Thème russe' is indicated at the head of the final movement of Op. 59, No. 1, and Beethoven went to the trouble of notating 'thème russe' each time it appears in the individual parts of the third movement of Op. 59, No. 2. While there is no notated reference to Russia in the third quartet, Mark Ferrugato has recently shown that the lilting theme of the second movement is closely related to a popular Russian song that was published in the musical newspaper *Allgemeine musikalisches Zeitung* in July 1804. Despite the explicit Russian connections, the quartets still clearly posed difficulties to their early Russian listeners.

*Op. 74 & 95: Scherzando*

The darker aspects of Beethoven's Op. 74, nicknamed 'The Harp' for its use of pizzicato in the first movement, also tend to be overlooked today. In comparison to the fractured turbulence of Op. 95, the 'Harp' may seem relatively straightforward to modern ears, full of songful lyricism and easy charm. Yet an early review from 1811 describes a more ambiguous listening experience, noting the quartet to be 'more serious than mirthful, more deep and artful than cheerful and appealing.' How can we account for this disparity? Beethoven's correspondence with his publisher, George Härtel, is potentially telling, revealing a more disturbing

backdrop to everyday Viennese life during the French invasion of 1809. Beethoven writes: *'what a destructive, disorderly life I see around me, nothing but drums, canons and human misery in every form.'* Are canons and drums what the same critic heard when he described 'savage national war dances' in the third movement? The opening gesture and C-minor key of the Scherzo is surely related to the iconic triple-note motif of the Fifth Symphony, with all of its associations with Jacobin songs of revolution. Even the harp conceit in the first movement is not as straightforward as it first seems. Before the invention of the double harp around 1810, the harp had a limited capacity to modulate beyond its home key. Whether or not the first listeners would have picked up on this subtlety, the breakdown of civilised harmonic order in the first violin semiquavers in the coda is clearly audible. The frenzied arpeggios across the strings and awkward hand shapes demanded by the diminished chords affords a visual spectacle that could not be further away from the gestural elegance expected of domesticated young ladies at the harp – the ultimate symbol of peace and heavenly harmony.

In contrast, the references to warfare in Beethoven's String Quartet in F minor, Op. 95 are violently overt, with dramatic unisons, leaping octaves and disconnected melodic material generating a jarring musical experience from the very first note. Beethoven himself entitled the work 'Quartett[o] Serioso' in the autograph score. The very form of the quartet makes an assault on structural conventions, with its shocking concision and *attacca* movements. Perhaps the most startling moment of all is the final coda, a whirlwind forty-bar *Allegro* that wrenches us unceremoniously into the clichéd world of *opera buffa.* Does this sudden turn to the theatrical and the comic undermine the authenticity of the tragic tone that has previously dominated? Beethoven was certainly preoccupied with the theatre in 1810, a year during which he was known to have been collecting and studying scores of Mozart's operas alongside composing his incidental music to Goethe's *Egmont,* also in F minor. Whether we see resonances between the triumphant 'Victory Symphony' of *Egmont* and the coda of Op. 95, or a deliberately unsettling incongruity, the ending to this most serious of quartets certainly raises more questions than it can answer.

*Finale*

At the sight of the eccentric opening of the second movement of Op. 59, No. 1, a 'solo on one note' featuring four bars of repeated B flats, Romberg felt so strongly that he promptly trampled his sheet music. Even the Schuppanzigh Quartet, a quartet that Beethoven affectionately nicknamed his 'Leibquartett' and who rehearsed and premièred all of his string quartets throughout his career, thought that Beethoven was playing a joke on them when they first received their parts. The first violinist, Ignaz Schuppanzigh, famously had more than one note to complain about, with Beethoven apparently retorting: *'what care I about your wretched fiddle when the spirit moves me?!'* Another altercation with Italian violinist Felix Radicati, to whom Beethoven had submitted his manuscript of Op. 59 for fingering, resulted in similarly immortal words: *'Oh, they are not for you, but for a later age!'* Both phrases have since passed into Beethovenian legend, supporting the familiar nineteenth-century narrative of a composer destined to transcend his own personal and cultural context to attain musical immortality. Yet it is this very historical context that can help us to keep the radical nature of these quartets alive today.

Torturous though his first engagement with the string quartet genre was, Beethoven's middle period quartets are testimony to the ways in which he liberated himself from the Classical language of his masters to engage in the *Zeitgeist* of Romanticism. Rather than writing *'for a later age',* this music was very much *of* its age; an age in which the spirit of intellectual challenge became an aesthetic principle. Contemporary philosopher August Wilhelm Schlegel argued that Romantic poetry is forever 'im Werden' (in process). In this way, a work of art is never complete: it is always unfolding, inviting the reader to continue the work. Where Haydn and Mozart used the art of rhetoric to persuade their listeners, Beethoven's middle period quartets instead confront, compel and perplex: the music grips us and demands our attention. Their subject is nothing less than the very act of engagement.

In a letter to George Smart dated 7th October 1816, Beethoven wrote of Op. 95: *'NB. The Quartet is written for a small circle of connoisseurs and is never to be performed in public'*

These 'connoisseurs' are exactly the sorts of readers that Schlegel imagined. In this way, Beethoven is not in fact excluding listeners, or indeed his performers: he is issuing a deeply personal invitation, asking us to become part of the ever-unfolding meaning of the music. The Calidore Quartet's recording offers another fresh perspective on works that invite, and even demand, constant re-visiting and re-interpretation: an imperative of the Romantic spirit in which they were composed.

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## THE CALIDORE STRING QUARTET

**Jeffrey Myers**, violin **Jeremy Berry**, viola
**Ryan Meehan**, violin **Estelle Choi**, cello

The Calidore String Quartet is recognized as one of the world's foremost interpreters of a vast chamber music repertory, from the cycles of quartets by Beethoven and Mendelssohn to works of celebrated contemporary voices like György Kurtág, Jörg Widmann, and Caroline Shaw. For more than a decade, the Calidore has enjoyed performances and residencies in the world's major venues and festivals, released multiple critically acclaimed recordings, and won numerous awards. The *Los Angeles Times* described the musicians as "astonishing," their playing "shockingly deep," approaching "the kind of sublimity other quartets spend a lifetime searching." The *New York Times* noted the Quartet's "deep reserves of virtuosity and irrepressible dramatic instinct," and the *Washington Post* wrote that "four more individual musicians are unimaginable, yet these speak, breathe, think and feel as one".

The New York City based Calidore String Quartet has appeared in venues throughout North America, Europe, and Asia including Lincoln Center, Carnegie Hall, Kennedy Center, London's Wigmore Hall, Berlin's Konzerthaus, Amsterdam's Concertgebouw, Brussels' BOZAR, and at major festivals such as the BBC Proms, Verbier, Ravinia, Music@Menlo, Rheingau, and Festspiele Mecklenburg-Vorpommern. Always seeking new commissioning opportunities, the Quartet has given world premieres of works by Caroline Shaw, Anna Clyne, Huw Watkins and Mark-Anthony Turnage and collaborated with artists such as Anne-Sophie Mutter, Anthony McGill, Jean-Yves Thibaudet, Marc-André Hamelin, Joshua Bell, Emerson String Quartet, Lawrence Power, David Finckel and Wu Han.

This season, the Calidore returns to the Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center and the University of Delaware to perform the complete String Quartets of Beethoven; and to the Colburn School to play the complete cycle of Korngold String Quartets. Other highlights of the 24/25 season include appearances with San Francisco Performances, the Celebrity Series of Boston, the Philadelphia Chamber Music Society, the Warsaw Philharmonic and BBC Radio at London's Wigmore Hall; and premieres and performances of works by Han Lash, Sebastian Currier, Xavier Foley, and Gabriela Montero.

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In their most ambitious recording project to date, the Calidore is set to release the final two volumes of Beethoven's complete String Quartets for Signum Records in the 24/25 season. Volume I, containing the late quartets, was released in 2023 to great critical acclaim, earning the quartet *BBC Music Magazine's* Chamber Award in 2024. The magazine's five-star review noted that the Calidore's performances "penetrate right to the heart of the music" and "can stand comparison with the best." Their previous recordings on Signum include *Babel* with music by Schumann, Shaw and Shostakovich, and *Resilience* with works by Prokofiev, Janáček, Golijov and Mendelssohn.

The Calidore String Quartet was founded at the Colburn School in Los Angeles in 2010. Within two years, the quartet won grand prizes in virtually all the major US chamber music competitions, including the Fischoff, Coleman, Chesapeake, and Yellow Springs competitions, and it captured top prizes at the 2012 ARD International Music Competition in Munich and the International Chamber Music Competition Hamburg. The Quartet first made international headlines as the winner of the $100,000 Grand Prize of the 2016 M-Prize International Chamber Music Competition and was the first and only North American ensemble to win the Borletti-Buitoni Trust Fellowship. The Calidore was also named a BBC Radio 3 New Generation Artist and in 2018, was awarded the Avery Fisher Career Grant, having won the Lincoln Center Emerging Artist Award a year prior. The Calidore is currently in residence with the Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center in New York.

The Calidore String Quartet serves as the University of Delaware's Distinguished String Quartet in Residence. In this capacity they direct the UD School of Music's Graduate String Quartet Fellowship and serve as artistic directors of the University of Delaware Chamber Music Series. Prior to taking this position, they served as artist-in-residence at the University of Toronto, University of Michigan and Stony Brook University. The Calidore is grateful to have been mentored by the Emerson Quartet, Quatuor Ébène, Andre Roy, Arnold Steinhardt, David Finckel, Günter Pichler, Guillaume Sutre, Paul Coletti, and Ronald Leonard.

The Calidore String Quartet plays the following instruments: Jeffrey Myers plays a violin by Francesco Rugeri c.1680, owned by a private benefactor on loan through the Leonhard Fellowship and plays a bow by Francois Tourte. Ryan Meehan plays a violin by Vincenzo Panormo c.1775 and a bow by Joseph Henry. Jeremy Berry plays a viola by Giovanni Battista Ceruti c.1811, owned by a private benefactor and a 1903 Umberto Muschietti viola and plays a bow by Pierre Simon. Estelle Choi plays a cello by Charles Jacquot c.1830.



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We'd like to thank the University of Delaware and Donald J. Puglisi and Marichu Valencia for their support of this project.

Recording Dates:
Op. 59 No. 1 – 19 & 20 December, 2022
Op. 59 No. 2 – 17 & 18 June, 2022
Op. 59 No.3 – 15 & 16 September, 2021
Op. 74 – 2 & 3 July, 2021
Op. 95 – 4 February, 2022

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Producer and Engineer – Judith Sherman

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